

Life's been a splash for Ray and Zada Taft

By JOHN HORGAN

Times Sports Editor

SAN MATEO — Call them the Peninsula's pre-eminent potentates of the pool.

Ray and Zada Taft, as they churn vigorously through their seventh decade, continue to swim their way to new heights.

The Tafts, both 72, will be among the inductees May 19 during the fourth annual San Mateo County Sports Hall of Fame banquet in Burlingame.

They have been local swimming fixtures since the mid-1950s.

At their little school in San Mateo, they taught an estimated 10,000 county youngsters to swim.

Some of those more talented nippers, like Ray Looze and Ted and Terri Stickles, have distinguished themselves at the national and/or international levels.

Another, Penny Dean, still holds the record for crossing the English Channel, for men or women.

Sports Hall of Fame

San Mateo County

As swimmers themselves, the Tafts have been establishing records in the masters' realm since the 1970's.

At one time, Ray held no fewer than 21 masters' swim marks simultaneously.

He has been swimming competitively since 1933. His first record came when he was a 9-year-old in San Francisco.

He says he would have been on the U.S. Olympic swim team in 1940 but World War II intervened.

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Today, he notes, "I have put my heart and soul into the masters' program." There's no argument on that score.

In 1975, he qualified for national competition in all masters' events in his age bracket.

Like her husband, Zada, has been swimming for 59 years. "I taught myself," she says. "I raced so I could get into the Neptune Pool in San Francisco for free."

Zada, also a native of San Francisco, first swam the Golden Gate channel at the age of 17. She did it 55 years later, too.

All told, she has crossed the roiling Golden Gate 22 times.

She also holds three Pacific Association masters' records. "And I'm having a ball," she adds.

The Tafts, who met at the Crystal Plunge in San Francisco in 1936, were married five years later.

They have three children and five grandchildren; they opened their swim school, with its 16-yard pool, in 1955 on 40th Avenue in south San Mateo near the Belmont border.

Now residents of Half Moon Bay, they have turned over the school to their daughter, Lynne.

During their teaching careers, the Tafts conducted open-water swims, life-saving classes, water safety classes and programs for stroke victims, heart patients

What San Mateo County Sports Hall of Fame induction banquet

When Tuesday, May 19, 7 p.m.

Where Hyatt Regency Hotel, Burlingame

Cost \$42.50 per person

Info 348-4345.

and the handicapped.

During the Vietnam War, they helped to train commercial airline crews as well.

One of their few regrets is that there is not a single 50-meter swimming pool located in San Mateo County.

"An awful lot of good swimmers have to leave the county to train every day," says Ray.

The May 19 induction banquet will be held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Burlingame.

No-host cocktails will be available beginning at 6 p.m. Dinner will be served at 7 p.m.

Tickets cost \$42.50 per person. Proceeds will benefit the Peninsula YMCA's outdoor education program.

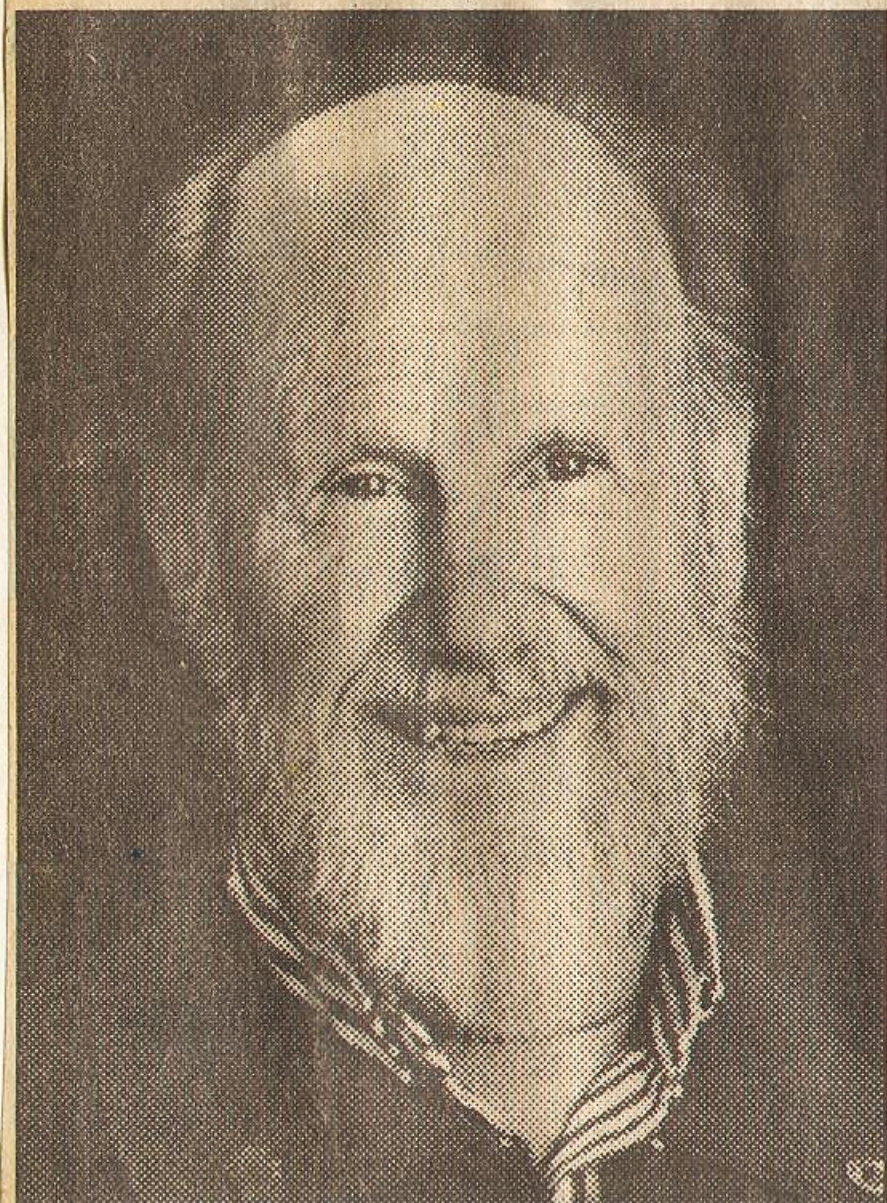
The Times sponsors the annual dinner.

For information, contact the newspaper at 348-4345.

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